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NSC BRIEFING

(Sov For Pol estimate)

I. If Moscow does test a new weapon at this point, what would be its motivation?

A. There exists possibility that Moscow believes its manifestations of strength made earlier this year have slipped into background and that the world believes it has been forced by internat weaknesses and the effective Western position of strength to seek a modus vivendi through negotiations.

(1) Beginning with Molotov's 8 February speech, in which he claimed the USSR had nuclear superiority, (the Sino-Soviet bloc's "position of greater) the post-Malenkov regime has emphasized strength" in comparison to the US. This was widely interpreted in the West as a reversion to Stalinist policy.

(2) However, the flexibility and reasonableness shown by the USSR in reaching an Austrian treaty, the Belgrade visit and the invitation to Adenauer made it apparent that the new regime was even more con-

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ciliatory than it had been under Malenkov--hence the "position of greater strength" announciated by Moscow earlier this year lost its impact. It never "caught on," either in the US or among its allies.

(3) The USSR is sensitive about appearing to be leading from weakness at the conference, and might want to exhibit its strength to the world. The Soviet leaders may believe that their military parades and fly-bys staged earlier this year have been insufficient.

(4) Against this background, the Soviet leaders may have decided to renew their effort to impress the United States and its allies by conducting a major nuclear weapons test, with attendant publicity around Summit conference time.

(5) The Soviet leaders, like the Czars, do not always make "rational" moves which, in Western opinion, would best serve their aims. Their heavy-handedness has caused them to lose much

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that they might have gained by greater restraint. With a man like Khrushchev now prevailing among the Soviet leaders, it possible that his marked lack of restraint might manifest itself in a decision to explode a nuclear weapon at or near conference time.

II. Assuming that such a test actually takes place, what would be the political repercussions?

A. The political significance would depend mainly on the use made of it by Bulganin and Molotov at the Summit talks.

(1) Its immediate effect would undoubtedly be bad.

a. The West, and even such "neutrals" as India, would interpret it as brandishing a threat over the heads of the Western delegates.

b. The entire Soviet propaganda campaign preceding the conference, which has contrasted Soviet concessions with western "positions of strength," would be upset.

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(2) Nevertheless, if the Soviet leaders soft-peddled the tests at the talks and used restraint in their propaganda coverage of the tests, it might restore public awareness of its earlier "position of greater strength" idea without serious damage to the conciliatory posture it has taken in preparing for the conference.

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